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ABSTRACT

This assessment of the politics of education is an attempt to clarify the kinds of political commitments of educational agencies through discussion of labels, concepts, classificatory schemata, and general conceptual frameworks which allow a person to bound his experience so he can organize it in a manner that is coherent with his physical environment and his social milieu. The approach rests upon three intellectual traditions which are conjoined in a model of the politics of education. The first comes from the linguistic analysis tradition in contemporary philosophy, the second is a version of the sociological conception of social control, and the third is the concept of ideology which has a basis in several intellectual disciplines (political science, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology). A framework for evaluating the labels employed in education and the conceptual commitments to which these labels are attached is developed. (Author/SHM)

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SOCIAL CONTROL IDEOLOGIES AND THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION

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I. THE PROBLEM

Decisions about both the organization of educational settings and the content of instruction confront a seeming paradox. Despite the variety of positions on what education is and how educational processes evolve, there is some agreement that the concept of education connotes a commitment to engendering, in those that are being educated, classificatory schemata and rules for processing information through these schemata so that persons can increase their control over themselves and their enviroment. What this implies (leaving aside for the moment educational philosophies which explicitly opt for models which maximize other rather than self control i.e. some models of indoctrination) is that the concepts, classificatory schemata, or frames of reference within which educational information is produced and exchanged should be regarded as tentative, subject to revision, and considered in the context of criteria which are, themselves, less than apodictic.

Yet, if one considers what it is that makes a person an efficacious agent in the world, it is a working familiarity with and commitment to labels, concepts, classificatory schemmata, and general conceptual frameworks which allow a person to bound his experience so that he can organize it in a manner that is coherent with his physical environment and his social milieu. The ability to act decisively in the midst of a welter of social and physical

stimuli is based upon habituation to a system of categories that give the world meaning and the individual criteria for action and rules for translating perceptual discriminations into effective actions or behaviors which have fairly clear personal and social meanings.

In short, the process of education in a society involves the institutionalization of uncertainty, the lack of ultimate closure on ascribing meanings to a persons transactions with his environment, but, at the same time, it also involves the institutionalization of modes for achieving closure, conceptual frameworks with unambiguous categories which provide for individual and collective decisions. Clearly, effective action on the part of a person requires, in any instance, closure at various stages of a decision process that leads to action. Perceptual discriminations, the creation and evaluation of action alternatives and the selction of modes of action implementation all require the prior firming up of categories.

This dilemma has achieved some recognition in the writings of academicians and practitioners concerned with education, but, it seems to me, the frame of reference within which the dilemma has been addressed is decidedly infelicitous. The relevant debate has been focused on the desirability of "labelling" both the participants (i.e. students) and the phenomena (i.e. the content of a social studies course) involved in the educational

process. The problem is not one of either labelling or not labelling but rather one of the significance attached to the labels that are employed. The problem exists at a higher level of abstraction than is usually considered in the "labelling" debate. The important question centers around the cognitive status of the labels that are attached to actors and subject matter in the educational process. Do the categories utilized describe reality, are they rough approximations of a reality that is imperfectly apprehended, or are they pragmatic strategies to be evaluated on the basis of their usefulness rather than their correspondence with the world (whatever that might mean)?

To label something is to give it a designation which indicates where it can be assumed to fit in a conceptual scheme. Among the implications of momentarily delimiting and describing phenomena by using labels is that, as I have suggested, it then becomes possible to respond to that phenomena i.e. to fit it into some action strategy. Labelling is thus an essential part of any decision process. It is the mechanism by which conceptual entities (concepts, constructs, ideas etc) are assigned observational equivalents so that the overall conceptual structure of which these entities are a part can be apllied to the world of experience. One can, however, label well or badly, and the labels can represent conceptual structures which function well or poorly. What is needed is not a moralistic attack on or defense

of labelling *per se* but rather a framework for evaluating the labels employed ineducation and the conceptual commitments to which these labels are attached. The way out of the labelling dilemma is the way out of most dilemmas in the form of apparent paradoxes. The solution to the now classic psychiatric notion of the double bind is a case in point One must make distinctions at more than one level of abstraction. One can be committed to labels at the level of their concrete application while, at the same time, remaining loosely allied to them with regard to their ultimate efficacy in organizing experience.

The frame of reference I will introduce to assess the politics of education is based on the assumption that, implicit in the labels developed and used in the educational settings, is a political process. This is not a new idea, but I hope to characterize this political process in a way that clarifies, more fully and usefully, the kinds of political commitments of educational agencies. The approach rests upon three intellectual traditions which will be conjoined in a model of the politics of education. The first comes from the linguistic analysis tradition in contemporary philosophy, the second is a version of the sociological conception of social control, and the third is the concept of ideology which has a basis in several intellectual disciplines (political science, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology).

II. THE PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEM

One of the primary contributions of contemporary philosophical analysis has been the elucidation of the evaluative components of simple descriptions. The work of Wittgenstein, for example, (1953) has disabused us of the belief that the categories we use derive their meaning by virtue of their correspondence with reality. We look now at the way in which categories function in discourse. What, then, is the significance of utterances which appear to be simple descriptions? In making such an utterance, for example, "France is a hexagonal," one is not making a statement whose truth or utility can be determined by simple observation. This statement's validity must be determined in the context of the purposes for which it was uttered. This statement, as John Austin pointed out, may be true for an army general planning military strategy but not for a geographer (Austin, 1962). Similarly, as John Searle has shown, the statement, "Brown hit a home run," is not a simple description (Searle, 1964). Following Anscombe (1958), Searle distinguishes between "brute" and "institutional" facts. To show that Brown hit a home run, one is required to do more than merely describe what was observed. The set of institutions which make up the game of baseball contribute to the meaning the this seemingly simple descriptive statement.One must know the rules before the act e.g. hitting a home run, can be given a meaning.

The significant point to be noted here is that simple designations

or so-called descriptions are based on prior evaluations and institutions or conventions. One cannot, as C.I. Lewis put it, "validate any conviction as to objective matters of fact without antecedent presumptions of the validity or normative principles" (Lewis, 1949). Hitherto, over-simplified notions of what description is have led to rigorous fact-value distinctions, on the basis of which it has been assumed that statements are value free descriptions unless they contain explicit evaluative language (words like should, ought, good etc.) Contemporary philosophy has disabused us of this simple fact-value distinction while, at the same time, impugning the old model of the nature of sense experience upon which the objective-subjective dichotomy is based. Man is not a passive agent surrounded by objects whose emanations cause him to see them as they are.. Rather, as Austin (1962a) and others have shown, he is a conceptually active agent whose mental activity helps to shape the structure of social and physical reality.

These changes in our philosophical frame of reference provide a basis for analyzing problems in any collective enterprise, whether one is concerned with a nation, a local community or a school. There are no concepts which are intrinsic to particular social and political processes. Problems do not emerge unmixed with human perception and the projection of human purposes.

"To term something a social problem," as Seeley has perceptively put it, "is...to enact a reclassification of some part or aspect of the common life in order to alter the response it will receive or the relation it will stand to other parts of the common life." (1964) The selection of concepts in the definition of a problem is a political process, then, for this selection determines what is to be changed, what is to be ignored, and , in some cases, who the change agents and who the status quo defenders are to be.

When a problem is identified in any social domain, a search for an explanation or theoretical overview ensues. The explanation generated will be based upon the concepts evoked in the definition of the problem. There are a variety of grounds for assessing the value of a particular explanation. When we invoke the norms of science, for example, we ask whether a particular explanation is valid i.e. does it meet the truth demands associated with inductive and deductive inference? There are, however, pragmatic and political grounds for evaluating explanations. These grounds are involved with the question, what is the explanation good for, who can use it to do what? For any given problem domain, there are a number of ~~ăă~~ explanations, which are valid on scientific grounds, that are potentially relevant to a problem. The selection among explanations will turn on the definition of the problem. This definition

involves a procedure (which is often disguised as an objective acceptance of things as they are) of value selection whereby the concepts selected for an explanation enfranchise some persons and disenfranchise others. Problems of order maintenance are particularly enlightening ones for viewing the "politics of concept selection." Consider the illustration I have developed in another context.

> Teachers in primary school classrooms frequently find that their attempts at communicating with groups of children are frustrated by the students' differing attention spans. They have found (much to their delight in many cases) that the attention span of a child is markedly influenced by body chemistry and that drugs prescribed by physicians frequently "calm down" what are referred to as "hyperactive" children to a point where they no longer create classroom disturbances by leaving their chairs and moving around while instruction is being attempted. On scientific grounds, the empirical explanation employed (in this case a bio-chemical one) is valid. There is good evidence that the classroom activity of the child is related to his body chemistry. The use of such an explanation, however, takes as given that children should learn while sitting together in groups on a schedule chosen by the school or the teacher. The hyperactive child concept, is an arbitrary one in that the criterion for calling a child hyperactive is social not biological. The fact that a chemical-biological type of explanation is often relied upon for a "deviant behavior problem," is a consequence of the educational value premise suggested above. From an alternative frame of reference, one could regard the teacher's problem as a strategic one. One could take as given the fact that children have differing interests and attention spans and ask how one might educate large numbers of them nevertheless. If the question is posed this way, the kinds of empirical explanations sought would probably not be chemical-biological. One relevant explanation, for example, would be oriented toward understanding why teachers feel that all the children in the classroom should have the same daily learning schedule. The concepts in such an explanation would probably be something like past training, current role expectations, etc. Once again the validity of the explanation would be determined upon scientific grounds, but the choice of the type of explanation to be employed and the concepts contained in it would derive from the value premises which precipitated the inquiry. (Shapiro, 1971).

As I have suggested in the same context, one might profitably view the classroom as a political system with an order problem. With such a frame of reference, a decision to deal with different metabolic rates of children in order to cope with the order problem is a commitment to a particular kind of social control. The choice of such a social control mechanism would probably be justified within a value framework placing a high priority upon controlling noise and movement but not within one in which a priority is placed upon building a flexible environment to cater to differing interests and potentials in school children.

Most significant political processes within a society take place in a context of different definitions of problems which relate to different images of man and diferent models of collective relations. The distribution of these models and images determines the extent of agreement on problem definition in a number of areas. Clarice Stoll (1948) has pointed out, for example, that police and welfare agencies frequently clash over social control techniques because they entertain different images of man, the former employing a purposive behavior model and the latter a social environment model. Thus when an instance of deviance occurs, the police are prone to viewing the problem within the framework of an individual acting out his intentions while welfare workers might view the same incident in terms of the social forces narrowing the kinds of responses that the individual could make.

It should be evident that the definition of a problem involves decisions about welfare outcomes. It determines, among other things,

the kind of adjustment that should be made to reestablish the equilibrium of the existing process or to bring about a new process. Inevitably, those who are disproportionately in control of the problem defining mechanisms are in a position to minimize their own adjustment costs while, at the same time, selling their adjustment model as the one appropriate to the public as a whole.

SOCIAL CONTROL IDEOLOGIES

The relationship between much of contemporary philosophy's view of the relationship between mental activity and the world of experience and the sociological concept of social control has already begun to emerge in the discussion thus far. The categorization of collective experiences is brought about not simply by something intrinsic to the experience but as a result of interpretations generated out of ideological frameworks. Sociological approaches to social control exemplify the kinds of ideological frameworks which are relevant to the politics of education because differing approaches to deviance in society by sociologists reflect differing commitments as to where the problems in a society inhere and thus where adjustments should be made. Similarly, the identification of problems in schools is most often framed in terms of deviancy problems and adjustment conceptions and techniques. Before considering the school as a political arena, then, let us look at sociological models of social control.

Recently, a student of social work categorized, quite efficiently, both the social work professions' and various sociological models of deviancy and their concommitant social control approaches (Kirk, 1972). The dominant social work model he calls the "welfare model." Within this model, the deviant is seen as a different type of person than "normal" persons in the society. There is a commitment to regarding this differnce as a public problem requiring remedial and rehabilitative action which is directed toward changing or "correcting" the attributes of persons who are deviant.[2]

In contrast with social work's "welfare model" are three sociological models. The first is referred to be Kirk (and Lemert, 1964) as the"structural model." This approach,whose origin is usually traced to the work of Durkheim, focuses on the social structural reasons for the emergence of deviance. The structural model, which employs cpncepts related to social structures (e.g. opportunity structures) rather than individuals (e.g. maladjusted person), assumes that problematic structures rather than problematic persons are the causes of deviance.

The second sociological model Kirk calls the"functionalist model." Those who employ this model (including Durkheim in his discussion of crime - see Wolfgang et. al.eds., 1962 - and Erikson - in Becker ed., 1964) argue that deviant behavior

[2] This model and the subsequent ones that Kirk discusses are all public models in that they assume the need for public, institutionalized responses as contrasted with the early American, Christian charity model which eschewed public, institutional responses (see Rothman, 1971).

is stability or boundary maintaining and thus functional for the society. Deviancy, according to functionalists, helps society to specify its norms and, as such, should not be entirely eliminated. The obvious imperative in functionalist models is thus one of avoiding intervention strategies aimed at totally eliminating deviance.

The third sociological model is the most politically cognizant of the four we are discussing, and , I shall argue, the most useful framework to use for the elucidation of the politics of education that is reflected in approaches to deviancy in the schools. Kirk refers to this model as the "societal reaction model," but it is perhaps best known by sociologists as the "labelling theory" approach to social control and deviance theory (see Schur, 1971). In this model, the reaction of the society to persons is seen as a major ingredient in the identification and institutionalized recognition of deviant behavior. It should be noted that this is not a traditional causal model which assumes that the societal reaction is causing something called deviance but rather the belief that deviance is what the society calls deviance, and that social propensities for calling a particular type of behavior by a particular person deviant are a function of political processes and ideological commitments. The "societal reaction" model, according to Kirk, focuses on "a fundamental fact - that social meaning is created through the interactive process in which shared definitions of reality are forged (Ibid., p. 27)

The political orientation of this model and its relevance to the labelling controversy in education can be explicated. The act of labelling a person as a deviant in any collective setting is a political act which exemplifies who the rule makers are and who are to be the targets of social control agencies which are employed to enforce adjustments when rules or norms are violated. Moreover, the use of functionalist, welfare, and even, to some extent, structural models of deviance is, itself, a social control strategy because the use of one of these models focuses attention primarily upon those who are labelled as deviants and neglects the role of and thus possible adjustments by those who do the labelling of deviants To be a labeller rather than one who is labelled is, among other things, to possess political power. A major consequence of such power is, as I have suggested above, that one is in a position to define problems in a way that allows the definer to avoid adjustments on his own part and direct enforced adjustments on others. If an urban riot takes place in the U.S., to use Kirk's example (Ibid., p. 28), those with power are in a position to have the incident defined as either a political act or a criminal act. The label that is selected will determine the fate of those involved in the riot i.e. it will mobilize the relevant social control agency and determine upon whom the agency will focus its energy. Similarly, if factory workers in Yugoslavia go on strike against the elected factory managers, those in power can define the act as either a loss of confidence in factory

leadership or as counterrevolution. Once again, the targets of the social control mechanisms employed and the nature of those mechanisms will be determined by the label selected and applied to the incident.

The groundwork has now been laid to begin constructing a framework for social control ideologies. A social control ideology applied to any collective enterprise is a persistent orientation toward whom or what should be adjusted when goals are unfulfilled or deviations from expected patterns are discerned. Such ideologies are reflected in the definitions of problems and the concommitant explanations employed as to why the problematic situation arose. Most persons carry social control ideologies around with them. These ideologies coordinate and direct their beliefs about and attitudes toward not only major public policy problems to which their own actions are only tangentially related related but also toward their own, everyday encounters.

Consider an example of an encountered I have suggested elsewhere (Neubauer and Shapiro, 1971). A person gets on a bus and remarks to the bus driver, "Gosh you sure are right on time as usual," to which the driver responds, "Hey schmuck! Can't you read? The sign says don't talk to the bus driver." Assuming that the person would find this to be a problematic encounter (one he would wish to avoid in the future), we can speculate about how he might try to remedy the situation (short of extreme strategies like shooting the bus driver or having his vocal cords removed).

While coping with the situation, he will select some categories to help identify his problem and coordinate these categories within an explanation of his problem. In so doing, the person has several options, and the option he selects will be a function of the social control ideology he applies to his own encounters. He may assume, based on this ideology, that this unpleasant encounter was his fault or his problem and start searching for an explanation of why he is so careless in not reading signs or why he cannot control his impulses to speak when it is inappropriate or illegal to do so. He could assume, rather, that the problem is one of matching his inclinations to speak with modes of transportation that permit it. He could then speculate about how it was that he had happened to be in the wrong place and could go about seeking to alter his travel patterns rather than his attentiveness or impulsiveness. He could, finally, embrace a more interactionist social control ideology and assume that the problem is at least equally shared by the municipal transit authority and/or the bus driver. He might, in the spirit of the "societal reaction" model of social control seek an explanation as to why rules are made which require him to adjust his gregariousness or travel pattern to avoid unpleasantness. This kind of social control ideology would provide a frame of reference for speculation and perhaps action on the person's part to change the rules or the rule making process that governs bus travel.

SOCIAL CONTROL IDEOLOGIES AND THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION

a) Classroom settings

I have already suggested one example above of a social control ideology operating in clasrooms when I quoted my past remarks on the"hyperactive child" concept. Subsequently, I remarks which expanded upon that same quotation I noted,

> We can view the primary school classroom as a political system...and then ask about the range of choice we have in characterizing the political process. If we decide to consider the differing metabolic rates of students we are, by implication, selecting a particular range of social control mechanisms relevant to manintaining "order," just as a consideration of student's interests makes relevant a different range of social control mechanisms. Thus, a rational choice of concepts to be employed must rest upon an extended assessment of the individual and collective consequences one might wish to engender. If, for example, the most desirable feature of the classroom is to be the maintenance of a minimum of noise and movement, a set of bio-chemical concepts might well be the ingredients of a very useful explanation. If, on the other hand, one considers the classroom in terms of the engendering of a particular kind of self-concept in the students, biochemical explanations would rpobably not be very useful. (Neubauer and Shapiro, Op.Cit.)

The dominant social control ideology operating in American classrooms is based, it seems, om a preoccupation with order and control and a presumption that violations of order in the form of public, unsolicited (by the teacher) remarks and what is referred to by educationists as "out of seat behavior" requires adjustments on the part of the student violators. As one text

for classroom teachers (revealing entitled Managing Student Behavior) puts it, "There is probably no one connected with a teacher education program who has not reached the conclusion that the topmost concern of the prospective teacher is classroom order and control. Other topics, including the subject matter to be taught, the general area of the nature of the process whereby learning takes place, or the quality of the situation or situations within which learning occurs, do command interest on the part of the prospective teacher. But repeatedly, he returns to the topic in which he invests most of his concerns, namely classroom order and control." (Amos and Orem, 1967, p. vii).

This text, and most others I have examined, goes on to assume that order problems originate in the school children and suggests explanations and frames of reference for adjusting children's behavior. For example, "If the teacher has a student who is not conforming to the regulations, she may try a number of teachniques to modify his behavior : a look of disapproval, a touch on the arm. an extra task to occupy him, the changing of his seat, a quiet talk - these are just a few of the possible actions." (Ibid., p. 39). Or consider the language of another text on classroom discipline, "...approximately 30 percent of elementary school pupils present some problems of maladjustment," and "about 10 percent of the elementary school children give evidence of problems that are sufficiently severe to justify clinical

attention." (Clarizio, 1971, p. 2). Note the causal models operating here. The pupils present the problems of maladjustment and the elementary school children give evidence of severe problems. Note also the casual descriptive style , employed as though maladjustment and severe problems in children can be discerned with simple observation. As labelling or societal reaction social control theorists have pointed out, someone has to provide a label and apply it to someone before they can be identified as deviants who require adjustment.

Theorists and technicians of classroom discipline and the teachers they train seem to regard their models of classroom problems as a combination of simple descriptions and unproblematic causal inferences rather than as ideological commitments whose major premises are political. In the case of the use of extreme social control teachniques like drugs for modifying behavior, school officlad regard their choice as a medical matter, oblivious of their role in making a political decision about who is to adjust and what costs are to be borne by whom in the process of adjusting. (Ladd, 1970). The use of drugs for children labelled as "hyperactive" is perhaps the most telling indicator of the political model that school authorities apply to the classroom, while disguising the desire to exact conformity under the rubrics of medical and scientific teachniques to improve learning. As the columist von Hoffman has pointed out, "For many a school authority the model student is one who persists in apparently useful behavior

over prolonged periods but who may be interrupted and set compulsively to work on new, non functional tasks. This is called concentration." (quoted in Hentoff, 1971).

The social control ideology that provides the framework for techniques ranging from subtle disapproval cues from the teacher to tranquillizers and amphetamines is part of an ideological framework that comprehends more than behavior within the classroom. Teachers and other school authorities see behavior in the classroom (the students' behavior primarily) as related to the school's role as a socializing agent that prepares students to conform to the values of the American society. It is thought, for example, that children will learn to control themselves in the future only if they are kept under tight control in the classroom (Ladd, Op Cit., p. 82)

The tight control model is reinforced by the American form of the classical liberal ideology which has been imported into the classroom unaltered. This ideology suggests that all significant achievements are individual rather than collective enterprises. Within such an ideological context, social interaction and group learning by children is eschewed. Children are separated in rows of individual seats and discouraged from interacting while learning. This atmosphere is maintained under the rubric of protecting students rights. Two student management specialists cited above, for example, describe discipline as follows: "Disciplined students respect the right of fellow

learners to the privacy needed for concentration and task completion." (Amos and Orem, Op. Cit., p. 18).They go on to make their classical liberal model of individual freedom in the classroom (which is seen as freedom from sociability) explicit. "The individual's liberty should have as its limits the right of others - due concern for the common good. One manifestation of this concern are the'social graces,' such as courtesy and good manners, making possible the interaction of many people with a minimum of friction." (Ibid.) It is clear that when social interaction is regarded as a necessary evil to be kept at a minimum and that the consummatory task, learning, is a wholly individual matter, one is going to be preoccupied with discipline because destroying natural sociability and frustrating cooperation is bound to be a full time job.

These commitments to tight control combined with the belief by school officals (which they share with proponents of structural models of social control - see Lemert, Op. Cit.) that there is one dominant culture with a set of values which are reflected in our institutions, results in the illusion that no political choices need be made by the school. They must simply mold students to conform to the expectations of the culture. This ideological commitment and its application in the schools is particularly destructive for children of ethnic minorities who represent part of what is, in fact, an enormously diverse American culture. We have, as Lemert has lucidly shown (Op, Cit.),

many value sub cultures, not one culture. Our institutions do not reflect the institutionalization of a general universal value pattern but rather the ability of some sub cultures to have their value patterns instutéd as public policy. Our schools, like our other institutions, reflect, then, political victories by the few, yet they operate as though their choices of models of order and curriculum are a function of scientific and technological rather than ideological commitments. "Why are our educational programs," asks one writer, "continuing to direct their energies toward a mythical central culture that does not exist anywhere? And why do our schools thus continue to be the agents of degradation and shame for so many youngsters who are made so acutely aware of their differences from the 'norm.'" (Charnofsky, 1971).

Faced with their overwhelming failure to educate students from the Black ghettos, school authorities resort to an explanation that, once again, suggests adjustments by someone else. They invoke the "culture of poverty explanation" (Leacock, 1970) or become concerned with, "diagnosing and correcting what is 'wrong'with the disadvantaged child," (Wilkerson,1970) suggesting that the failure of these students has nothing to do with the way the school is run.

b) The content of instruction

The politics of education inheres not only in the mode of

classroom management but also in the approach to the subject matter of education. Labels are attached to the phenomena or subject matter of instruction just as they are attached to the actors in the classroom. Labelling and conceptually integrating phenomena, just like labelling studnnts involves political commitments. Here again, students are given models which suggest that they are not in control. Again they must adjust, this time to absorb rather than being quiet and keeping still. In courses ranging from mathematics to social studies, students are treated as receptacles into which information is placed. Freier designates the dominant mode of instruction as the "banking concept of education." "Education becomes an act of depositing in which the students are the depositories and the teachbr is the depositor." (Freier, 1970). The categories and the frameworks of which they are a part are imparted to students as though the world was being described rather than strategically classified. As I suggested in my discussion of the philosophical dimension of the problem, what appear to be simple descriptions are actually complex, convention and insitution laden interpretations. The categories one uses to apprehend experience are strategic commitments which should be employed as long as they are useful and abandoned when they cease to function in behalf of the user. Yet students are taught Euclidean geometry as though it were a true description of the structure of the physical worl and are taught the histories of the U.S. and other countries as though they have

been told unequivocally what has actually happened. There are many geometries and there are many histories. Riemannian geometry and Lobachevskian geometry can claim the same truth as Euclidean (they are equally internally consistent). The choice among geometries is a matter of what geometric strategy proves most useful in the context. Housing contractors are well advised to embrace Euclid while astronomers are usually better off of they employ Riemannian assumptions.

I recall my seventh grade social studies course in which we were taught that the Soviet practice of rewriting history is conclusive proof of the deceit they practice in almost every aspect of their social and political life. After all, history deals with facts, and if you rewrite it, you must be dealing in falsehoods at some point in the process. The idea that a change in social and political patterns might change the relevance and thus interpretation of past events and that the nature if "facts" and "events" is a function of the conceptions employed was never considered in my classroom.

The explanations and frames of reference employed to deal with the subject matter of education are no less political, i.e. slected because of their pragmatic significance, than the explanations employed to deal with classroom order. By being presented with models of classroom order as though they are mere descriptions of the situation, students are required to adjust as though there is no choice. In like manner, the proferring of models of

history, mathematics, physics, economics, etc. as though they are descriptions of what the world os like again tells the student that he has no choice, that he is a passive receptor whose mental activity has no role in structuring the meaning of his social and pshysical environment. He is taught that learning is a matter of absorbing material rather than of making conceotual decisions.

Most disciplines learned in the schools have potential relevance to students, but the appraoches of many disciplines disenfranchise many students by the selections they make. Capitalist economics is a useful approach for children of the white midlle and upper classes but not for children from most Black, Puerto Rican and Chicano families. Yet all are taught the same economics as thiugh it were a description of what exchange systems are and must be. The situation is the same for other disciplines, history, literature etc. The choice of curriculum, coupled with the "descriptive falacy," the disguising of interpretations and evaluations in statements in a descritive or observational mode is, itself, a social control mechanism. It disenfranchises the student from his rightful purchase on his own experience, the recognition that the labels he attaches to phenomena have strategic significance, that they operate in someone's behalf and that he would thus be well advised to consider them in this light.

Conclusion

Much of the politics of education is disguised in the labels utilized for both the actors in the educational process and the subject matter of instruction. Discussions by educationists about whether it is a good idea to label things, animate or inanimate, are banal in the extreme. The world of persons and things takes on meaning only by being labelled. To the extent, however, that labels are regarded as unproblematic descriptions, the political process which operates in educational enterprises will be elusive. The relevant political questions turn around the labels or concepts employed in education. These questions involve the control implications of the labels and the broader conceptualizations of which they are a part. Labels used to stipulate the model of order in the classroom have implications for who is in control of that setting, and for who must adjust when problems are identified. Labels used to identify the subject matter of education have similar control implications. If a student is to achieve maximal cognitive control of his environment, to understand, in short, his predicament, he must be taught to use labels not to find or accept them.

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